



Working with Local Emergency Government

Practical Advice for Community Leaders

When Disaster Strikes...

Step back and let emergency response personnel do their jobs to save lives and property.

Follow notification procedures outlined in your emergency operations plan. If you don't have such a plan, contact your county emergency director.

Contact your county emergency director regarding additional services needed from local, state and national levels.

This document is IFAS publication DH 308.

Adapted by UF/IFAS from:
Disaster Handbook for Extension Agents (Wisconsin Cooperative Extension Service)

Develop an Emergency Operations Plan

Unlike counties, individual communities are not required by law to have emergency operations plans. But such plans are an excellent idea for a number of reasons.

Emergency operations plans maximize the efficiency of your community's response to a disaster.

Besides unifying response groups, plans identify areas requiring special assistance in an evacuation, such as a nursing home located beside an area known for flooding, or a chemical manufacturing facility located next to a residential area.

Emergency operations plans ensure that community leaders know their roles and responsibilities during a major emergency.

Remember, as a local official you may not be responsible for a disaster, but your effectiveness will be carefully scrutinized by the public during and after the event. Lives, property and a way of life are at stake for many in the community. An emergency operations plan covers your responsibilities in reporting a disaster, developing public policy and being part of an effective Integrated Emergency Management System (IEMS) — the link between local emergency resources and those at county, state and national levels.

Emergency planning creates support structures between local government, rescue personnel, businesses, schools, hospitals, Extension agents and relief agencies.

Without an existing response structure and familiarity, groups may duplicate services or simply misdirect efforts in a disaster. Others to include in the planning process could be churches, the Salvation Army, civic groups, social services and public health personnel.

Emergency planning creates a support structure between your community services and those of your county emergency government. Greater familiarity between the two of you promotes a faster county response to your needs if local services are overwhelmed. (Call the State Warning Point, (904) 413-9910, for the telephone number of your county's office.)

When Disaster Strikes...

Be prepared to identify areas impacted by disaster either verbally or, if possible, by marking them on a map.

Be prepared to submit damage assessments of public and private property to the county emergency management office. Keep accurate records of disaster-related expenditures.

Delegate. If you are being mobbed by the media, ask your emergency management director for assistance.

You don't need a major commitment of time and money to put a plan in place.

Begin with a simple commitment to planning. Then, contact your county emergency management office. Every office is equipped to help you develop a written emergency operations plan and knows how to follow through with regular updating and practice.

Involve and Educate Your Community

Not only must your community leaders, municipal staff and emergency response personnel be prepared for disaster, residents, businesses, schools and hospitals need to be prepared, too.

Get the media involved in disaster awareness.

Invite them to emergency operations training and exercises.

Distribute press releases on personal preparedness related to seasonal disasters such as hurricanes, tornados or floods.

Distribute a community newsletter that reviews disaster preparedness and safety issues appropriate to the season or your community's disaster potential.

If a disaster such as flooding is inevitable, warn people not to drive when water has overflowed curbs. Review evacuation procedures and shelter sites long before an evacuation is necessary.

Offer presentations on local emergency issues to civic groups, professional groups and schools.

Develop a schedule of practice sessions for your emergency response plan.

Use tabletop exercises, functional drills with individual response teams such as fire or law enforcement, or full-scale disaster drills with multiple parties responding to an on-site mock disaster.